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ABSTRACT

While American attitudes appear to be changing in the direction of increased acceptance of women's employment and men's involvement in parenting and homemaking, research on sex role attitudes has focused primarily on middle class Caucasian subjects, thereby neglecting the minority groups that make up American society. Chinese (N=69) and Japanese (N=244) American college students completed questionnaires measuring sex role beliefs and attitudes toward women's employment. While the results comparing the sex role beliefs revealed no significant differences for women, Chinese- and Japanese-American men were found to differ significantly on four of nine items. The results comparing attitudes toward women's employment revealed that Chinese- and Japanese-American women differed significantly on three of nine items, while Chinese- and Japanese-American men differed significantly on six of nine items. Chinese-American men were found to be more traditional or conservative than Japanese-American men in nine out of ten cases where significant differences were found, while Japanese-American women were more traditional than Chinese-American women in two out of three cases where significant differences were found. (Tables listing the variables studied, with results, are appended). (NRB)

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Chinese and Japanese American Student Attitudes Toward Male/Female Roles*

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess Chinese and Japanese American college student attitudes toward various dimensions of men and women's work/family roles, and to identify differences in their beliefs and attitudes. Chinese men were more traditional or conservative than Japanese men in 9 out of 10 cases where significant differences were found. Japanese women were more traditional than Chinese women in 2 out of 3 cases where significant differences were found. Results are discussed in terms of cultural traditions and implications for work and family life in a multicultural society.

Chinese and Japanese American Student Attitudes Toward Male/Female Roles

Dramatic changes seem to be occuring in how Americans, both men and women, allocate their life energies to work and family commitments. While women join the labor force in record numbers, men seem to be accepting relatively more responsibility for home and family than they did in the past. Concerns about such changes, and their potential effects on women, men, marriage and family, children, and society, have lead to research and a growing body of literature on work-family interface.

Research on work/family interface suggests that beliefs and attitudes are important variables that mediate the effects of changing work-family commitment patterns on individuals and families (Ferber, 1982; Gianopalos & Mitchell, 1957; Nye, 1963; and Orden & Bradburn, 1969). Men and women often differ in their work/family beliefs and attitudes (Agassi, 1982; Engel, 1980). Men's attitudes appear to strongly influence the career development of most women (Farmer & Bohn, 1970; Hawley, 1971, 1972; Spitze & Waite, 1981; and Tangri, 1972). And American attitudes appear to be changing in the direction of increased acceptance of women's employment and men's involvement in parenting and homemaking, and greater equalitarianism.

The research to date on sex role attitudes focuses primarily on middle class caucasian subjects, thereby neglecting the many minority groups that make up American society and culture. Research is needed to assess the attitudes of Americans of other cultural extractions and to identify variations in ideals and attitudes toward men and women's work-family roles that result from historical and cultural differences.

The history of Chinese immigration and assimiliation in America is well documented (Char & Char, 1982; Glick, 1980; Huang, 1976; Tseng & Char, 1974). In the second half of the 19th century, Chinese laborers were imported to work on the sugar plantations in Hawaii. They typically saved their money and left the plantations as soon as possible to start small businesses in the towns. Hoping to return to China, they tried to maintain the traditional Chinese way of life. While some eventually returned to China, and a few moved on to the U.S. mainland, most remained in Hawaii. Traditional Chinese values emphasizing family and education were maintained despite acculturation and assimilation. The Chinese were very successful, such that they have one of the highest per capita incomes of all groups in Hawaii today. According to Tseng & Char (1974), "at roughly 4 percent of the population, the Chinese of Hawaii are one of the smallest groups in the islands; yet due to certain cultural traits they wield influence in the professions, business and politics far out of proportion to their numbers."

In China, men and women were traditionally segregated (Engel, 1982). According to traditional ideals, women stayed home to manage or carry out the housework and childcare. Women's education was limited in an attempt to keep women in their place in the home. Indeed, the feet of wealthy women were bound such that they were unable to move about freely. Poor women, however, could not always afford to live by the traditional ideals, and often joined the men in the fields at harvest time. The majority of Chinese migrants to Hawaii were poor. However, relatively few of the women joined their men in work in the fields (Char & Char, 1982). Rather, they worked as domestics, took in sewing at home, or raised vegetables and poultry for the family.

The history of Japanese immigration and acculturation is also well documented (Kitano & Kikumura, 1976; Ogawa, 1978; Yamamoto, 1982). As the Chinese worked their way up and off the plantations of Hawaii, Japanese laborers were imported to take their place. Between 1885 and 1907, nearly 180,000 Japanese immigrated to Hawaii, usually with hopes of making a fortune and returning to Japan (Ogawa, 1978). More than half of these immigrants eventually did return to Japan (Yamamoto, 1982). Like the Chinese, the Japanese also gradually worked their way off the plantations. Many of the Japanese left the plantations to go into independent farming, while others switched to fishing, building, or service occupations. The Japanese eventually became one of Hawaii's most populous ethnic groups, accounting for 25 percent of the population in 1980 (State

of Hawaii, 1980). Although not commanding the large family business conglomerates associated with Chinese, the Japanese Americans of Hawaii are solidly middle-class, well represented in government, civil service, teaching, social service, and medical professions (Kinzie & Furukawa, 1974).

At the time of Japanese immigration to America, Japanese ideals for women's roles emphasized homemaking and the domestic arts. According to Baron Kikuchi, former Minister of Education and President of both Tokyo and Kyoto Universities:

> Our female education, then, is based on the assumption that women marry, and that its object is to fit girls to become "good wives and wise mothers." . . . [The] man goes outside to work to earn his living . . . it is the wife's part to help him, . . . by sympathy and encouragement, by relieving him of anxieties at home, managing household affairs, looking after the household economy, and, above all, tending the old people and bringing up the children in a fit and proper manner (1909:266; cited by Smith, 1983).

This ideal fit the life styles of samurai and nobleman families much more than it did the more common farm, artisan, and merchant families (Smith, 1983). The Japanese women who immigrated to America were from the poorer classes, often from farm families, and as such were used to working for the family enterprise. It's not surprising, then, that they would continue to work, once they arrived in America. At the same time, they could idealize the

roles of the classes to which they aspired, and pass such ideals on to other generations as traditional Japanese ideals.

While both Chinese and Japanese Americans have been very successful in academics, business, politics, and the professions, little is known about their sex role beliefs and attitudes. The purpose of this study was to assess Chinese and Japanese American college student attitudes and to identify similarities and differences in their attitudes toward various dimensions of men and women's work/family roles.

Method

A questionnaire was designed to measure sex role beliefs and attitudes toward women's employment. Some items, those focusing on why women "should" or "should not" work outside the home, were used in earlier research by Hewer and Neubeck (1964) and Engel (1978, 1980). Subjects were asked whether they "agreed," "disagreed," or were "uncertain" about each belief or attitude statement. Demographic items assessed ethnic background, sex, age, marital status, and individual and family work histories.

Questionnaires were administered to over 500 American college students at the University of Hawaii. Subsamples of students with Chinese (N = 69) and Japanese (N = 244) ancestry were selected for purposes of comparison. Both Chinese and Japanese groups averaged

22 years of age and 15 years of formal education. The majority (81% of Chinese men, 86% of Japanese men, 92% of Chinese women, 93% of Japanese women) of subjects were single. Most of the subjects (55% of Chinese men, 66% of Japanese men, 73% of Chinese women, 67% of Japanese women) were employed full or part time while going to school. Seventy-three to 80 percent of all groups reported currently employed fathers. The majority (55% of Chinese men, 70% of Japanese men, 76% of Chinese women, 71% of Japanese women) also reported currently employed mothers. Only a minority (42% of Chinese men, 21% of Japanese men, 22% of Chinese women, 20% of Japanese women) reported mothers who were unemployed housewives.

The data were summarized in terms of frequencies and percentages of each group (men and women analyzed separately) who agreed or disagreed with each attitude or belief statement. Chi-square tests were used to determine significance of differences between Chinese and Japanese groups.

Results and Discussion

The results of chi-square tests comparing the sex role beliefs of Chinese and Japanese American college students are summarized in Table 1. While no significant ($p < .05$) differences were found for women, Chinese and Japanese men were found to differ significantly on four of nine items.

Insert Table 1 about here

While the majority of all groups disagreed with the statement (item 1) that "women's place is (or should be) in the home," significantly ($p < .01$) more Chinese men (25%) than Japanese men (0%) agreed with the item. Thirty-one percent of the Japanese men were "uncertain" about this item.

Whether women have the ability to perform both career and family roles continues to be an issue for individual couples and for research. The average college student in 1959 tended to believe that women could not adequately perform both career and family roles (Hewer & Neubeck, 1964). Similarly, Kaley (1971) found that married professional males held negative attitudes towards the dual role abilities of married professional women. In contrast, the results of this study show that Chinese and Japanese American college students tend to have positive attitudes toward women's abilites to perform both roles. While only a small minority of Chinese (7%) and Japanese (11%) women believed that (item 2) "the responsibilities of career and home are too much for most women to handle," significantly ($p < .01$) more Chinese men (41%) than Japanese men (13%) held this belief.

Forty-one percent of Chinese men, compared with 25 percent of

Japanese men, and 20-21 percent of women, believed that (item 3) "wives and mothers should take primary responsibility for the care of house and children, even when they work outside the home." Similarly, 47 percent of Chinese men, compared with 31 percent of Japanese men and 20-21 percent of women, believed that (item 4) "women are naturally better suited for housework and child care than are men."

All groups tended (94-100 percent) to agree that (item 5) "responsibilities for the care of house and children should be shared by husband and wife." Unfortunately, the items were not designed in a way that could measure ideal degrees of sharing.

Significantly ($p < .05$) more Chinese men (53%) than Japanese men (25%) believed that (item 6) "the man of the house should be the primary source of financial support for the family." Only minorities of Chinese women (18%) and Japanese women (31%) agreed with this item.

Significantly ($p < .05$) more Chinese men (50%) than Japanese men (25%) believed that (item 7) "most men would enjoy housework and child care if they gave it a try." Fifty-seven percent of Chinese women and 48 percent of Japanese women agreed with this item.

The majority of Chinese men (59%) and Japanese men (56%)

believed that (item 8) "when a couple reverses roles, difficulties are likely to arise in marital adjustment." Forty-six percent of Chinese women and 44 percent of Japanese women also agreed with this item.

The majority of Chinese women (79%), Japanese women (73%), and Japanese men (55%) did not believe that (item 9) "having a father who is a househusband would have a harmful effect on a child's development." With 31 percent agreeing with this item, Chinese men may have more concerns regarding potential harms to children.

The results of chi-square tests comparing Chinese and Japanese American college student attitudes toward women's employment are summarized in Table 2. Chinese and Japanese women were found to differ significantly on three of nine items, while Chinese and Japanese men were found to differ significantly on six of nine items.

Insert Table 2 about here

All groups agreed that (item 1) "wives or mothers should work outside the home to meet financial responsibilities." Nevertheless, significantly more Japanese women (94%) than Chinese women (89%), and Japanese men (87%) than Chinese men (66%) agreed with this item.

Engel (1978) found college students to be increasingly disenchanted with the homemaker role. The results of this study shows that the majority (58-82 percent) of both ethnic groups tended to believe that (item 2) "housework provides inadequate opportunity for expression of intellectual interests." Significantly more Chinese women (82%) than Japanese women (58%) agreed with this item. Similarly, significantly more Chinese women (50%) than Japanese women (30%) believed that (item 3) "there is not enough work in the home if there are no children." Thus, Chinese women seemed to have slightly more negative attitudes toward housework.

The majority (55-68%) of all groups agreed that mothers of infants should not work outside the home (item 4). There was much less consensus, however, in situations where children were older. Significantly ($p < .01$) more Chinese men (72%) than Japanese men (39%) opposed maternal employment when children were of preschool age (item 5). Thirty-six percent of women opposed maternal employment under these circumstances. On the other hand, Chinese women (68%) and Japanese men and women (57%) were not opposed to maternal employment when children were school aged (item 6). Significantly ($p < .05$) more Chinese men (28%) than Japanese men (10%) opposed maternal employment under these conditions.

Traditionally, some women chose to be housewives because they liked the life style. Engel (1978) found college students were

decreasingly willing to accept this as an acceptable reason for being unemployed. The results of this study suggest a continuation of the same trend. While all groups generally rejected the notion that (item 7) women "like to do housework," significantly ($p < .05$) more Chinese men (19%) than Japanese men (4%) considered this a reason for women not to work outside the home.

While the majority (72-96%) of all groups rejected the idea that (item 8) wives should not work because "it would make their husbands feel 'less of a man'," significantly ($p < .05$) more Chinese men (16%) than Japanese men (2%) held this belief.

Significantly ($p < .01$) more Chinese men (22%) than Japanese men (7%) agreed with the statement that (item 9) wives/mothers should not work because men are responsible for financial care of their families." Eighty-nine percent of Chinese women and 84 percent of Japanese women rejected this attitude.

Chinese American men appeared to be more traditional or conservative than Japanese men on nine of 10 items where differences were significant. Chinese American women appeared to be less traditional than Japanese women on two of three items where differences were significant. This suggests that Chinese American couples may differ more and have more conflict over work/family roles than Japanese and possibly other ethnic groups.

Both Chinese and Japanese groups inherited patriarchal traditions wherein men had privileged roles in the family and in society, and women's ideal "place" was in the home. Traditional ideals were followed when people could afford the cost. Many of the early immigrant women had to work in the fields to survive. However, the Chinese had a head start in climbing the ladder of economic success, because they were leaving the plantations and starting small businesses when the Japanese were just arriving to labor on the plantations. Partially because of this head start, the Chinese have one of the highest per capita incomes of all ethnic groups in Hawaii today. The Chinese male students surveyed in this research were less likely to report being employed, less likely to report having an employed mother, and most likely to report having an unemployed housewife mother, compared with Japanese male students. It may be that men are more privilaged in the modern Chinese American home than in the modern Japanese American home. At any rate, they experience a different world and family role models. This probably accounts for some of the findings wherein Chinese men appear to be more traditional than Japanese men.

At the time of immigration, official Japanese government policy and programs encouraged women to be "good wives and wise mothers" (Smith, 1983). Such ideals may have been passed on to subsequent generations in America, and account for some of the results showing Japanese women to be less negative towards traditional homemaker roles than Chinese women. On the other hand, real life experiences

of immigrants in America, wherein Japanese women were more likely to work outside the home than were Chinese women, may have influenced subsequent generations, such that Japanese women appear to be more accepting of women's employment for financial reasons than do Chinese women.

Any conclusions and generalizations from the results of this study should take into account various limitations in the data. Data based on college student samples may not be generalizable to other groups. Similarly, results and conclusions based on data on Chinese and Japanese Americans from Hawaii may not necessarily be generalizable to Chinese and Japanese Americans reared on the mainland.

Conclusion

Chinese and Japanese American men were found to differ significantly ($p < .05$) in their beliefs about women's "place" in the home, women's abilities to handle both home and career, men's family financial support roles, and men's emotional reactions to housework and childcare. They also differed significantly in attitudes related to employment of women for financial reasons, maternal employment with pre-school and school-age children in the family, women's feelings about housework, effects of wives' employment on men, and men's family support roles. In nine out of ten cases in which significant differences were found, Chinese men

appeared to be more traditional or conservative than Japanese men.

Chinese and Japanese American women were found to agree on most of the sex role beliefs and women's employment related attitudes surveyed. Nevertheless, significant differences were found in attitudes related to financial motivations for women's employment, potential for intellectual interests and expression in housework, and housework without childcare. In two out of three cases where significant differences were found, Japanese women appeared to be more traditional or conservative than Chinese women.

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Table 1. Sex Role Beliefs of Chinese and Japanese American College Students

Sex Role Beliefs	WOMEN					MEN				
	Chinese (N = 37)		Japanese (N = 154)		Chi-square (df = 4)	Chinese (N = 32)		Japanese (N = 90)		Chi-square (df = 4)
	%A	%D	%A	%D		%A	%D	%A	%D	
1. Women's place is (or should be) in the home.	0	96	2	84	3.14	25	53	0	69	22.58**
2. The responsibilities of career and home are too much for most women to handle.	7	82	11	78	0.40	41	37	13	60	10.86**
3. Wives and mothers should take primary responsibility for the care of house and children, even when they work outside the home.	21	64	20	62	0.25	41	31	25	44	2.93
4. Women are naturally better suited for housework and child care than are men.	21	68	20	60	1.40	47	22	31	37	3.27
5. Responsibilities for the care of house and children should be shared by husband and wife.	100	0	98	1	0.56	97	3	94	1	2.05
6. The man of the house should be the primary source of financial support for the family.	18	57	31	53	2.74	53	25	25	36	8.44*
7. Most men would enjoy housework and child care if they gave it a try.	57	4	48	8	1.22	50	19	25	20	7.22*
8. When a couple reverses roles, difficulties are likely to arise in marital adjustment.	46	29	44	29	0.12	59	16	56	17	0.11
9. Having a father who is a househusband would have a harmful effect on a child's development.	4	79	7	73	0.78	31	44	13	55	5.15

Note, response alternatives included "agree," "uncertain" and "disagree." "%A" indicates the percentage of subjects that agreed with a given item. "%D" indicates the percentage of subjects that disagreed with a given item. Agree and disagree percentages do not always sum to 100 because of uncertain responses.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

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Table 2. Chinese and Japanese American College Student Attitudes Toward Women's Employment

Attitudes Toward Women's Employment	WOMEN					MEN				
	Chinese (N = 37)		Japanese (N = 154)		Chi-square (df = 4)	Chinese (N = 32)		Japanese (N = 90)		Chi-square (df = 4)
	%A	%D	%A	%D		%A	%D	%A	%D	
WIVES OR MOTHERS SHOULD WORK (OUTSIDE THE HOME): ...										
1. ... to meet financial responsibilities.	89	7	94	1	6.25*	66	13	87	6	7.06*
2. ... because housework provides inadequate opportunity for expression of intellectual interests.	82	11	58	25	5.94*	63	12	63	18	0.80
3. ... because there is not enough work in the home if there are no children.	50	46	30	45	7.84*	34	53	31	46	1.50
WIVES/MOTHERS SHOULD NOT WORK (OUTSIDE THE HOME): ...										
4. ... because they are needed at home if there are infants in the home.	68	18	55	23	1.58	66	19	58	23	0.51
5. ... because they are needed at home if there are preschool children in the home.	36	36	36	39	0.21	72	12	39	31	9.94**
6. ... because they are needed at home if there are school age children in the home.	4	68	15	57	2.79	28	31	10	57	8.12*
7. ... because they like to do housework.	7	82	9	79	0.19	19	50	4	79	11.48*
8. ... because it would make their husbands feel "less of a man."	0	96	2	92	0.81	16	72	2	83	7.17*
9. ... because men are responsible for financial care of their families.	0	89	5	84	1.34	22	47	7	77	10.52**

Note, response alternatives included "agree," "uncertain" and "disagree." "%A" indicates the percentage of subjects that agreed with a given item. "%D" indicates the percentage of subjects that disagreed with a given item. Agree and disagree percentages do not always sum to 100 because of uncertain responses.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$